

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT

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U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON
ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS
UNITED STATES SENATE**

July 27, 2006

Good morning Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee. I am Deborah Dietrich, Director of the Office of Emergency Management in the Office of Solid Waste and Emergency Response, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss EPA's role under the National Response Plan (NRP) and Agency response efforts under the Stafford Act following Hurricane Katrina.

The magnitude of the damage from Hurricane Katrina presented significant challenges for EPA and our partners at the Federal, State and local levels. EPA has a long standing and positive relationship with FEMA, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), the U.S. Coast Guard and other Federal agencies, as well as our partners in State and local government. As with other Federal agencies, our involvement is facilitated through the NRP. While there is always room for improvement, we believe that these relationships provided the basis for an effective response to the most destructive natural disaster in the history of the United States.

Under the NRP, EPA is the Coordinator and Primary Agency for Emergency Support Function (ESF) #10-Oil and Hazardous Materials Response. Our primary

activities under this support function include: efforts to detect, identify, contain, clean up or dispose of oil or hazardous materials; removal of drums and other bulk containers; collection of household hazardous waste; monitoring of debris disposal; air and water quality monitoring and sampling; and protection of natural resources. EPA is also a Support Agency for a number of other Emergency Support Functions.

For example, under ESF #3-Public Works and Engineering, which addresses solid waste debris removal, EPA provides necessary support to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) by assisting in the location of disposal sites, providing safety guidance for areas affected by hazardous materials, assisting in the management of contaminated debris, and by coordinating or providing assessments, data, expertise, technical assistance, and monitoring.

In response to Gulf Coast hurricanes, and in coordination with our partners, EPA performed a wide variety of tasks including: response to more than 70 emergency situations including hazardous materials releases and oil spills; assessment of more than 4,000 water and wastewater systems to determine viability after the storm; environmental monitoring and sampling of water, air, floodwater and residual sediment resulting in more than 400,000 analyses. EPA conducted extensive outreach through the media and the Agency website and distributed millions of flyers to alert the public and communities about potential risk and methods to address handling of potentially contaminated debris. EPA also responded to FEMA's request for assistance and rescued approximately 800 evacuees. Over the months since Katrina struck the Gulf Coast, more than 1,600 EPA

employees from across the country participated in the response. At the height of activities, approximately 245 EPA employees and 1,400 contractors and support personnel were deployed.

Removal and proper disposal of the unprecedented amount of debris in the affected areas has been a major undertaking since the beginning of the response. While the USACE has the federal lead responsibility for debris removal under the NRP, EPA has worked closely with USACE, FEMA, and State and local governments to assist in debris removal activities. For example, EPA assisted the States in developing guidance regarding demolition of structurally unsound buildings as well as guidance for debris burning. Along with FEMA and the USACE, EPA provided assistance to the States as they developed their debris removal plans.

EPA collected more than 4 million unsecured or abandoned containers of potentially hazardous wastes and facilitated the recycling of more than 630,000 electronic goods. We have also assisted in the proper handling and recycling of more than 380,000 large appliances. These collections included curbside pick-up as well as the operation of emergency collection sites.

The management and disposal of non-hazardous debris is a State and local responsibility. However, at the request of the States of Louisiana and Mississippi, EPA assigned staff to provide support by visiting debris disposal sites, and observing waste handling, including sorting and management practices at emergency disposal sites.

Observations of waste handling practices were reported to State and local authorities for any appropriate follow-up action.

EPA's mission in Alabama and Mississippi is now complete and any remaining activities have been transitioned to the States. In Louisiana, EPA activities are winding down and are now focused on the collection and disposal of household hazardous waste, landfill monitoring, and environmental sampling. These efforts are generally occurring in the St. Bernard and Orleans parishes. Work is expected to be completed in October 2006.

At EPA, following the events of September 11, 2001, we introduced an Agency wide National Approach to Response designed to improve our readiness for incidents of national significance. As part of this initiative, we provided an ICS training and exercise program for emergency response personnel and others, which allowed our personnel to organize into Unified Command with the U. S. Coast Guard and States very early in our response under ESF-#10. The Agency also implemented a response support corps (to include staff beyond our responders) allowing us to identify staff in advance who could use their skills and expertise in the response. In the area of information technology, improvements to systems regarding formatting, review and storage of laboratory data facilitated the process we used to analyze data quickly so that information about potential risk can be provided to the public and responders. Overall, we believe this approach contributed significantly to our Katrina response efforts.

CONCLUSION

The response to Hurricane Katrina has clearly necessitated strong cooperation among the Federal, State and local government agencies. We believe that the Stafford Act, the National Response Plan and the preparedness activities under the National Incident Management System contributed positively to our ability to respond to Hurricane Katrina. EPA has recently participated in the review of the NRP and we will continue to work with our Federal, State and local partners to address the nation's preparedness for future catastrophic events.